

Beyond Bone Health: Recommendations for Dairy Intake Bolstered by New Research

By 2d Lt Sarah Moore

Sure, who hasn't heard the news that milk "does a body good"? Over the past decade, dairy products have been given a lot of publicity—and for good reason! It would be hard not to notice the "Got Milk?" ads that have appeared on everything from magazines pages to billboards. Hollywood celebrities, sports stars, musicians, and even cartoon characters sport their milk mustaches with pride and tout the benefits of daily milk intake: strong bones, beautiful skin, and enhanced energy and performance. And maybe you've even noticed the National Dairy Council's "3-A-Day" logo reminding us that dairy products are an excellent source of not only protein and calcium, but also phosphorous, potassium, and Vitamins A, D, B-12, riboflavin, and niacin—nutrients essential for a healthy body.

Despite the fact that milk and dairy campaigns have been so widespread in our culture, the message doesn't seem to be getting across. According to the 2004 Surgeon General's Report on Osteoporosis and Bone Health, the incidence of osteoporosis is continuing to increase in America. This suggests that the typical American is still not consuming the recommended three servings of dairy per day. Perhaps the emerging research linking dairy consumption to weight loss will help change that. The "Got Milk?" and "3-A-Day" campaigns seem to mainly target children, growing teenagers, and older adults—age groups that have increased calcium requirements for bone growth or maintenance. The average adult may have only thought about milk as they were buying it for their kids—until now.

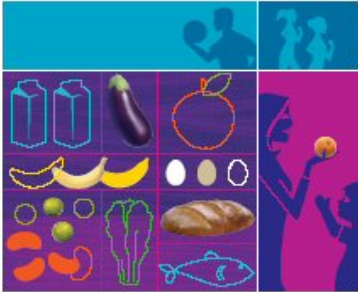
While much of it is still in progress, research on dairy's possible "anti-obesity" effect may help emphasize the importance for adults to get their daily servings of milk. Recent studies conducted at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville suggest that including the recommended

three servings a day of dairy as part of a healthy diet will help keep the pounds off. The potential benefits do not stop there. These same three servings of dairy foods may actually help to speed weight loss while cutting back on calories. The emerging link between dairy and weight loss may overturn the unfortunately popular trend of avoiding milk and dairy while dieting. Including these calcium-rich foods could effect a positive change in the weight loss realm, possibly tipping the scales and helping to win the battle against expanding waistlines.

While the ramifications of these studies would be far-reaching, the science supporting these claims has not been fully explored. Much of this controversy has also been fueled by the fact that the dairy industry has funded many of these studies; many are skeptical that these claims are based on politics instead of science. Despite these accusations however, the body of evidence that supports these claims is growing. Various clinical trials and studies examining dairy intake and obesity have shown that increased dairy consumption has not only decreased overall weight, but has particularly decreased body fat, especially around the middle. This is good news. Abdominal obesity is specially known to increase risk for other health complications, such as heart disease and insulin resistance. Aside from being associated with burning body fat, dairy products—when included as part of a healthy diet—may also help to prevent gaining fat in the first place. It is interesting to note that in a study conducted in the United Kingdom in 1998, greater amounts of weight loss were observed with reduced-calorie diets that included three servings of dairy per day, than with similar-reduced calorie diets which only included one or less servings of dairy. In addition to its effect on body fat stores, milk and dairy products may also help to maintain lean body mass—better known as muscle. A newer, less recognized campaign funded by America’s milk processors has promoted these new claims; “24 oz in 24 hours” advises “Milk your diet. Loss weight!”

While the scientific evidence is slowly increasing to support these claims, there are still some holes in the theory. Some studies have observed no significant effect on weight loss or fat mass with increased dairy consumption, as evidenced by a recent research study conducted at two major universities in Indiana. Others have noted different effects in men and women, African American and Caucasian. In addition, it can hardly become a blanket statement that more milk equals “less of you.” It is important to consider the dairy source. For instance, while ice cream is a dairy product, eating it three times a day for a year will not help you slim down. Unfortunately, the proposed fat-burning, muscle-maintaining benefits of dairy foods do not override the number of calories or grams of fat these products contain. Weight management always comes down to calories; calories-in must be less than calories-out in order to bring about weight loss. Dairy foods in your diet however, may enhance weight loss or help you to simply maintain weight. The recommended three servings of dairy, therefore, should come from sources that are low in fat—1% or non-fat milk, low-fat or fat-free yogurts, and lower fat cheese. These would make a great substitution for soft drinks or those afternoon munchies.

Since it is unlikely that research will ever be able to establish the connection between



- Consume a variety of foods within and among the basic food groups while staying within energy needs.
- Control calorie intake to manage body weight.
- Be physically active every day.
- Increase daily intake of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and ***nonfat or low-fat milk and milk products.***
- Choose fats wisely for good health.
- Choose carbohydrates wisely for good health.
- Choose and prepare foods with little salt.
- If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation.
- Keep food safe to eat.

Dietary Guidelines
for Americans
2005

For more information, visit <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/>

dairy consumption and weight regulation 100%, it is important to take what we do know about dairy and apply it to our food intake. The best

advice for now? Follow the USDA Dietary Guidelines for 2005, and make sure to get your three servings of low-fat dairy foods per day. At the very least, choosing these dairy products will give you a nutritional bang for the caloric buck! As the richest source of calcium—better absorbed than supplemental calcium—dairy products help to build strong bones and protect against osteoporosis. They also serve as a source of high quality protein, packed with essential vitamins and minerals. If future research continues to confirm a direct link between dairy intake and weight control, anyone already including low fat dairy products will be ahead of the game, keeping excess body fat from accumulating, burning fat more efficiently—especially around the mid section—and maintaining lean muscle mass. And if the connection with weight loss is discovered to be a misinterpretation of data, milk nevertheless provides a great nutritional package. Regardless of the controversial weight loss effects, dairy sources should be included in a healthy diet. What is there to lose?...Except maybe some of that extra fat.